

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following is a complete listing of revised claims with a status identifier in parenthesis.

LISTING OF CLAIMS

1-50. Cancelled

51. (New) A sound masking system for controlling ambient noise in a physical environment, comprising:

a communication network;

a plurality of sound masking units, the plurality of sound masking units communicatively connected to one another via the communication network, each sound masking unit including an associated sound masking signal generator, each sound masking signal generator configured to generate and output a sound masking signal based on a control signal received over the communication network, each sound masking unit is configured to selectively output a paging signal received over the communication network based on the control signal; and

a control unit configured to generate the control signals to selectively control operation of the plurality of sound masking units, configured to send the control signals over the communication network, and configured to send the paging signals over the communication network.

52. (New) The system of claim 51, wherein the plurality of sound masking unit are connected in a series in the communication network.

53. (New) The system of claim 52, wherein each of the plurality of sound masking units includes a first interface and a second interface, the first interface interfacing with an upstream side of the communication network, and the second interfacing with a downstream side of the communication network, the upstream side being closer to the control unit and the downstream side being further from the control unit.

54. (New) The system of claim 51, wherein the plurality of sound masking units are associated with a plurality of sound masking zones, each sound masking unit being associated with one of the plurality of sound masking zones, and the sound masking units providing sound masking for the associated sound masking zone independently of the other sound masking zones.

55. (New) The system of claim 54, wherein the sounds masking units associated with each sound masking zone provide sound masking tailored to suppress sound in the associated sound masking zone.

56. (New) The system of claim 54, wherein a number of the plurality of sound masking units is different from a number of the plurality of sound masking zones.

57. (New) The system of claim 51 wherein the control unit includes an address generator for assigning addresses to the sound masking units.

58. (New) The system of claim 57, wherein the address generator comprises a component for generating a logical address for each of the sound masking units, and the logical address being derived from an identifier associated with each of the sound masking units.

59. (New) The system of claim 51, wherein each of the sound masking units includes a control component, the control component being selectively responsive to the control signals for controlling characteristics of the sound masking signal.

60. (New) The system of claim 59, wherein the controllable characteristics of the sound masking signal include a variable contour characteristic.

61. (New) The system of claim 59, wherein the controllable characteristics of the sound masking signal include a variable gain characteristic.

62. (New) The system of claim 59, wherein the controllable characteristics of the sound masking signal include a variable frequency characteristic.

63. (New) The system of claim 59, wherein the controllable characteristics of the sound masking signal include a volume characteristic.

64. (New) The system of claim 51, further comprising:

a remote control unit configured to send adjustment signals wirelessly to the control unit; and wherein

the control unit is configured to receive the adjustment signals and generate the control signals based on the received adjustment signals.

65. (New) The system of claim 64, wherein the remote control unit is configured to receive sound measurements and generate the adjustment signals based on the received sound measurements.

66. (New) The sound masking system of claim 50, wherein the control unit is configured to generate control signals indicating which paging signal on the communication network a sound masking unit is to output.

67. (New) A networked audio system, comprising:

a communication network carrying a plurality of audio channels and a control channel;

a plurality of audio output units, each audio output unit configured to selectively output one or more audio signals on one or more of the plurality of audio signal channels based on the control signal carried over the control signal channel of the communication network, and each audio output unit including an associated sound masking signal generator configured to generate and a sound masking signal based on the control signal received over the communication network, and each audio output unit configured to output the sound masking signal; and

a control unit configured to selectively output one or more paging signals on the plurality of paging channels, and the control unit configured to generate the control signal and output the control signal on the control signal channel.